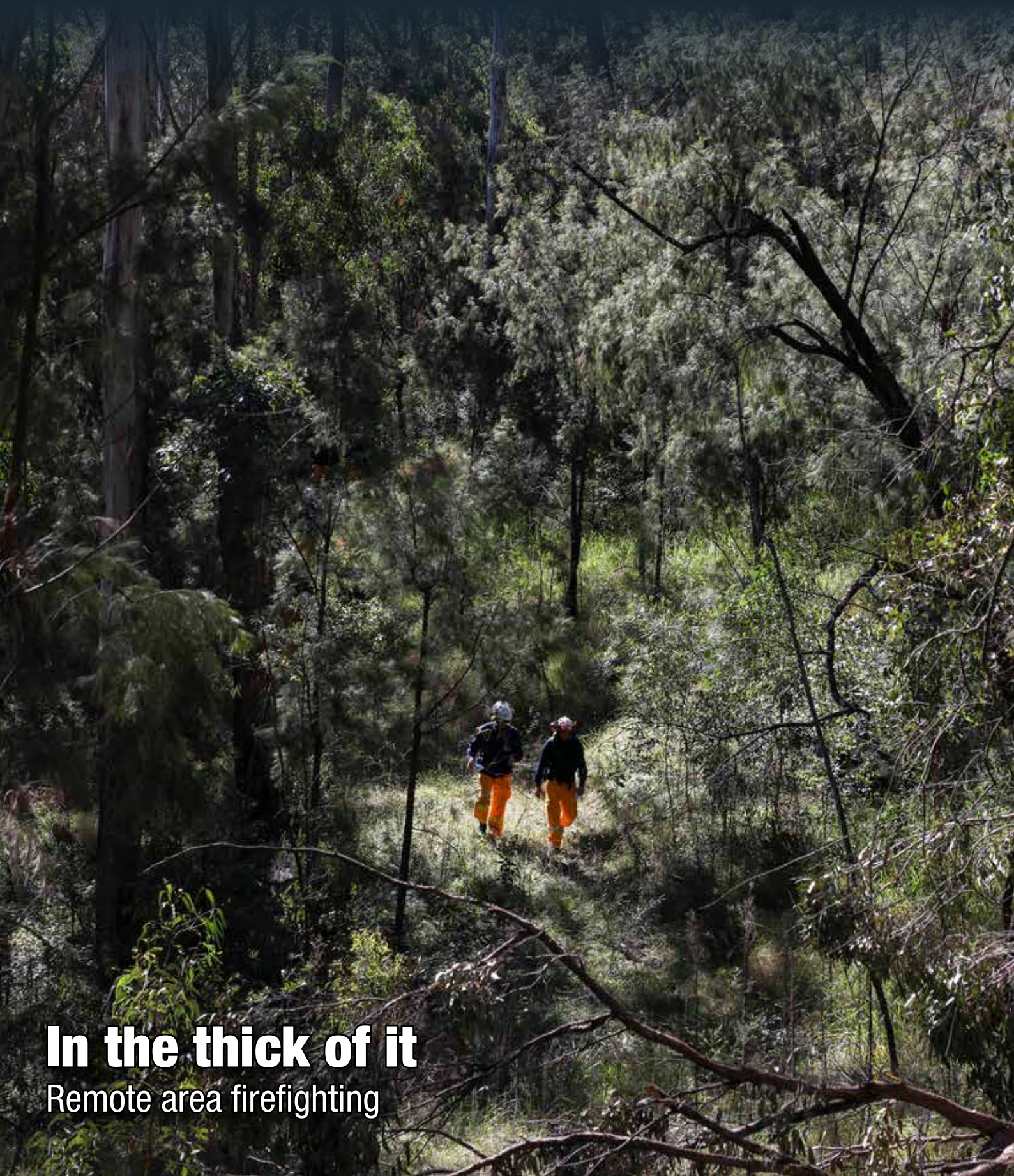


# RESPONSE

RESILIENT AND READY FOR THE PEOPLE OF QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND'S OFFICIAL FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES MAGAZINE

JUNE 2022



**In the thick of it**

Remote area firefighting

# CONTENTS

## HIGHLIGHTS

### OPERATION SESBANIA

Preparing for bushfire season

4



### FIRST NATIONS BUSHFIRE SAFETY OFFICERS

Caring for country

10



### NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Celebrating our volunteers

14



## ON THE COVER

Rural Fire Service members took part in a Remote Area Firefighting Team (RAFT) exercise in June. Photo by Sarah Ebsworth.

**RESPONSE** is a bi-monthly magazine produced by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services. Contributions and feedback are welcome. The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions for brevity and clarity.

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» Operation Sesbania	4
» Supporting Vanuatu through COVID-19	5
» The Angellala Creek explosion	6
» QFES shares USAR expertise	7
» A champion for Coen	9
» First Nations Bushfire Safety Officers	10
» Chaplains: someone to talk to	13
» National Volunteer Week	14
» A howling success	16
» The future of warnings	17
» Taking action against DFV	18

## AROUND THE STATE

» South Western Region	20
» Far Northern Region	21
» Northern Region	22
» Central Region	23
» North Coast Region	25
» Brisbane Region	26
» South Eastern Region	27

## COMMUNITY

» A brush with cancer	28
-----------------------	----

## GALLERY

32

## SPOTLIGHT

» Paula Douglas	34
-----------------	----

# FOREWORDS



**GREG LEACH AFSM**

**Commissioner**

## **QUEENSLAND FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES**

May brought an unseasonal deluge of rain, and with many catchments already soaked, creeks and rivers rose rapidly. Across northern and south-east Queensland, our staff and volunteers were on the ground keeping people safe.

National Volunteer Week, which includes Wear Orange Wednesday, gave us a chance to thank our volunteers for their hard work during the floods.

The State Emergency Service (SES) received more than 13,600 requests for assistance, with some groups completing a year's worth of tasks in a few days. More than 2,300 Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers supported the community.

As busy as we've been with floods, we also need to prepare for bushfire season. While modelling suggests it won't be as severe as other seasons, it's still vital for us to engage with the community and ensure everyone is prepared. Our operational period for this year's bushfire season will be known as Operation Ochre.

I was privileged to chair a panel for Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) Prevention Month in May. The panel was a chance to explore this year's theme of 'All of us, together' and discuss how our members confront DFV on the job.

In May we also held a morning tea to mark our continuation as a White Ribbon accredited workplace committed to preventing DFV. QFES remains committed to addressing DFV and taking active measures to ensure a safe, inclusive workplace.

In May we also launched Mindarma, an online learning program to support our volunteers' psychological wellbeing. Mindarma teaches a range of strategies to help manage stress both in volunteering and daily life.

Thank you to our sponsors, NAB and Suncorp, for their commitment to our volunteers' wellbeing.

It was an honour to attend the National Fire and Emergency Memorial Service in Canberra to commemorate those who have lost their lives in the line of duty. We honoured 13 fire and emergency service personnel, including SES volunteer Merryl Dray, whose family received an AFAC Memorial Medallion.

A big shout out to all those who attended the State Emergency Service Leadership Conference recently. The conference brought together all Local Controllers to strategise, including components for emergency volunteer leaders. It was great to see 150 volunteers, Local Controllers and staff in attendance.



**STEPHEN SMITH AFSM**

**Acting Deputy Commissioner**

## **CAPABILITY AND STATE SERVICES**

In mid-March I took on the role of Acting Deputy Commissioner of the new Capability and State Services Division.

We have welcomed the Fire and Rescue Service into our division, as well as taking on responsibility for providing overall strategic leadership for state capability, strategy and policy for all QFES services.

For QFES, capability is defined as the ability to achieve a desired effect through having the capacity to mobilise the right people with the right training, the right information, and the right equipment in the right place at the right time.

Following the Executive Leadership Team meeting in May, we are working to enliven the capability model through the owners and senior leads who are responsible for the overall success of each capability.

This increased focus on capability will ensure we plan well, invest where we need to, and position ourselves to meet future challenges.

While volunteering is no longer in the division's name, it remains crucial for us. We can have great systems and equipment, but people will always be our greatest asset.

In May I was delighted to attend the Governor of Queensland's Reception for Emergency Services and Flood Recovery Volunteers. Many volunteers from the State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service joined us on the night.

The Governor thanked all our volunteers who generously supported the community during the floods and the recovery efforts.

She particularly acknowledged the Dray family and acknowledged SES volunteer Merryl Dray's service and sacrifice, which will always be remembered with solemnity and gratitude by all Queenslanders.

The Marine Rescue Implementation Working Group (MRIWG) continues to progress the implementation of an integrated marine rescue service.

At a MRIWG meeting on 31 May in Yeppoon, the Minister for Fire and Emergency Services, the Honourable Mark Ryan MP, announced the name of the new service: Marine Rescue Queensland.

This name was overwhelmingly supported by the volunteers surveyed, and it acknowledges the important role they play in keeping the community safe out on the water.

The two existing marine rescue service organisations will continue to be supported during the implementation.

As I continue in this exciting new role, I look forward to meeting with many of you and hearing about your work.



# Full steam ahead for Operation Sesbania

Operation Sesbania is changing the way Queensland communities prepare for bushfires.

Wayne Ford, Manager Bushfire Safety, said Operation Sesbania, the new bushfire mitigation program that replaced Operation Cool Burn, was all about managing country.

“It’s a huge change of mindset in how we do business,” he said. “The bushfire mitigation season is no longer between April and August. It’s now a three-year operation that runs from January to December each year.”

All Bushfire Safety Officers (BSO) came together at the end of April for their official introduction to Operation Sesbania.

“We introduced the BSOs to all the new tools and the Operation Sesbania Dashboard so they can go back to their regions and work with Area Fire Management Groups (AFMG) to implement the operation,” Wayne said.

“Most of the AFMGs have met and put together their bushfire risk management plans.”

While bushfires may not be front of mind for a lot of Queenslanders after so much rain, Wayne pointed out that 49 per cent of the state is still drought-declared.

“Some areas have had record rainfall in April and May, but it’s not raining everywhere. Most of the models are predicting wet weather through winter. If that’s followed by dry weather in August

and September, vegetation could dry out, leading to grassfires.”

The rain has prevented many crews from carrying out mitigation activities, but QFES members have been hard at work on Minjerribah and in Northern Region and Far Northern Region.

“Mitigation burning and firebreaks may not be an option in many locations this year because of the rainfall, so instead we’re focusing on community engagement,” Wayne said.

“Of course, telling people to prepare for bushfire when there’s six inches of rain at night has its own challenges, but a lot of bushfire preparation is the same as for storms: cleaning out the gutters, tidying up the yard, making an emergency kit.”

## The history of Sesbania

The operation is named after the Sesbania Rural Fire Brigade near Hughenden. In 1954, three men from the brigade died while fighting a grassfire in a paddock.

Errol Enriken was the local fire warden for several years and currently owns the Sesbania property. He was seven years old when the fire broke out.

“A father, son and jackaroo from one went to fight the blaze,” Errol said.

“There was a storm and the wind was changing rapidly. I think a lightning strike

sparked the fire. It’s all open country out here, so when the wind’s chopping and changing and the fire burns back over partially burnt land, you’re in trouble.

“One of the men forgot something and went back into the fire to get it, but the wind changed and he didn’t come out. One of the others went to get him, but he didn’t come out either.”

The son brought the other two men out in a truck, but it was too late. He was so badly burnt his hands were stuck to the steering wheel, but he was able to go home and see his wife and six-week-old baby.

He wrote his will on the floor of the pub in Caulfield while waiting for the train to take him to the hospital in Hughenden. One of the brigade members was a JP and witnessed it for him. His wife went with him to the hospital and he lived for about three days. Wayne added, “When those men went to fight that fire it was a different world. It was nine years after War World II. There wasn’t a lot of money around. No radios, no weather reports, nothing. They would have worn khaki shirts, army boots and slouch hats. They went out with what they could to protect their community.

“Now we have new technology and equipment, but the risk is still the same. Nothing new happens out there that hasn’t happened before.”

# Assisting our Pacific neighbours

**Station Officer Brad Mills deployed to Vanuatu with an Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT) to support the country's response to their first wave of COVID-19.**

A trained AUSMAT logistician, Brad has also been deployed with the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team several times over the past 12 years, including to Christchurch after the 2011 earthquake.

He's also travelled to countries such as Japan, Taiwan and the US to support their development of USAR and Disaster Assistance Response Team (AUS-1 DART) capabilities and participate in exercises.

AUSMATs consist of doctors, nurses, paramedics and logisticians deployed at short notice to provide medical care following disasters. Previous AUSMAT deployments include the severe flooding in Timor-Leste in 2021, measles outbreak in Samoa in 2019 and Thailand cave rescue in 2018.

AUSMAT has also responded to COVID-19 outbreaks in the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Timor-Leste and Kiribati.

Brad was deployed to Vanuatu with three doctors and a nurse for 14 days.

"Vanuatu is an isolated island, so they're at the start of their COVID journey – where Australia was two years ago," Brad said.

"When we got over there, they were in lockdown except for essential services, with a curfew from 6pm to 6am. We had to isolate for three days, so we did a lot of Zoom meetings to set everything up.

"Our team was based at Port Villa on the main island Efate and we mainly worked in conjunction with health staff at Port Villa Hospital.

"It was my first AUSMAT deployment, so the logistical side of it was a challenge. I'm more used to working in natural disaster zones, not medical responses, so there were a lot of differences. On the plus side, we didn't have to sleep in tents."

Brad provided logistical support to the AUSMAT members and local health services, including communications, transport, accommodation and meals.

"The AUSMAT doctors and nurse trained local staff and helped with COVID cases. I acted as the in-between, taking them around, making sure everyone was fed, arranging transport and so on.

"We met with government departments and flew a doctor and nurse to a smaller island called Santo to inspect their facility.

"It was rewarding to go to another country and help out in a small way. That's why we do the job we do.

"They were already on their way to dealing with it. We were in that boat two years ago so we knew the next steps.

"It was a pleasure and honour to assist the AUSMAT members so they could concentrate on assisting the people and country of Vanuatu."



Brad's team included three doctors and a nurse.



Brad supported the operations of a COVID-19 isolation facility in a local football stadium.



# Disaster at Angellala Creek

It's been called the most powerful explosion in Australian transport history. On 4 September 2014 – Father's Day – a truck travelling along the Matilda Highway with 53 tonnes of ammonium nitrate left the road, crashed into a dry creek bed and caught fire.

Four firefighters and a police officer from Charleville extracted the injured driver and were tending to him when a small explosion rocked the truck.

They were putting the driver on a stretcher about 20 or 30 metres away when a much larger explosion blasted the area, destroying two fire trucks and a nearby road bridge. White sparks fell from the sky like fireworks.

The explosion damaged a railway bridge built in 1897, along with a police car parked 200 metres away.

"The railway bridge was blown from its pylons and the concrete road bridge was flipped upside down and turned to rubble," Superintendent Warren Buckley, who oversaw the clean-up, said.

The explosion registered 2.1 on the Richter scale. Residents in Charleville, more than 30 kilometres away, thought it was an earthquake.

"Thankfully no one was killed but eight people were injured. The truck driver received burns to 35 per cent of his body while the others suffered fractures, lacerations, head and chest injuries and deep burns.

"It's unbelievable what our staff were exposed to and still survived. During that incident, I saw how much QFES cared for staff and their families. That's something I'll remember for the rest of my career."

Two of the firefighters received the Commissioner's Medal of Valour and two received the Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery. The four firefighters also received the Pride of Australia Award.

"The ruins were still smouldering the next day and we had to make sure there was no ammonium nitrate left," Warren said. "The QFES Scientific team made the scene safe before other agencies started their investigations."



Responders found thousands of truck parts spread over kilometres.



Warren Buckley at the explosion site, featuring a sculpture made of the pillars of the railway bridge.

The explosion had a huge impact on the local community.

"The road took more than 12 months to rebuild and in the meantime bypasses had to be put in and local traffic diverted," Warren said.

Due to the significance of this incident and the challenges of communications in remote areas, there was a review of communications within South Western Region.

"The whole region reviewed their satellite phones and communications technology, making sure we had the most modern technology. This is continually being reviewed," Warren said.

"It changed a lot of lives, that job, and not just within QFES. It changed the way many organisations think.

"I'm proud to be part of an organisation that is, in many ways, on top of the game for hazardous materials and treats it very seriously."

## Visiting the site

The ruins are now an historic site honouring the bravery of the crews. Commissioner Leach visited the site during his recent tour of the region.

"It was extraordinary to see first-hand the explosion site," the Commissioner said. "First responding crews were faced with difficult circumstances and willingly put themselves at risk to assist others in need. It was astonishing to learn no lives were lost.

"As a result of the Angellala incident, QFES has implemented doctrinal changes including tactical guides for emergency response to explosives and fireworks and additional awareness training about ammonium nitrate. We have contributed to external standards and advised partner agencies regarding chemical data and emergency response guides.

"The incident provides an opportunity to reflect on how we prepare our workforce to face incidents of this magnitude and improvements we can make through training, doctrine, response, incident management and dynamic risk assessments."



The meetings were attended by more than 700 participants from 149 countries.

# Sharing our USAR expertise

**QFES' Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capability is world-class, and in May we shared our expertise and built relationships with other nations by engaging in two international events.**

Commissioner Greg Leach and Assistant Commissioner John Cawcutt travelled to Geneva to attend the Humanitarian Network and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW) meetings hosted by the United Nations (UN).

AC Cawcutt said this was the main global meeting for humanitarian support across the world.

"It's about humanity trying to help humanity," he said. "It was really important for the Commissioner to be there because it showed QFES' commitment to do our part."

He and Commissioner Leach attended various International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) events.

"INSARAG is split into three regions – Europe/Africa, the Americas and the Asia-Pacific. The regions do a lot of training so they can all interact. We all work off the same song sheet."

"For instance, during the Christchurch earthquake, the Japanese team worked on the other side of the building to us and we all used the same terminology, systems and techniques, which made it safer for everybody."

"At the meetings there was a big focus on the Asia-Pacific, because we identified that region has the highest risk for catastrophic disasters, but the lowest number of USAR teams. It's likely our teams will need to deploy there in the future."

Commissioner Leach and AC Cawcutt had discussions with officials including the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and Australia's Permanent Mission and Consulate General, Geneva.

They also met with leadership from countries such as South Korea, Fiji, Japan, US, New Zealand, France and Singapore about regional capacity building.

AC Cawcutt said Australia had an excellent reputation for USAR.

"Australia is viewed as one of the leading countries in the area. Our reputation gives Australia considerable voice in driving domestic and international improvements."

Just a few weeks after the meetings, the USAR capability was put into practice. The Prime Minister of Pakistan declared a national emergency for bushfires, and QFES provided remote specialist support.

## Mentoring other teams

Meanwhile, Acting Deputy Commissioner Stephen Smith travelled to Los Angeles to mentor their USAR team (USA-2). QFES members have previously mentored New Zealand, Japan, China and Fairfax County and worked informally with many more teams to help improve the global response system.

A/DC Smith helped develop the USAR program in Queensland. In 2007 he became the Manager of Technical Rescue and

oversaw the classification of the USAR Taskforce, through the UN, as a Heavy International USAR Team.

"Australia's and Queensland's USAR capability is very highly regarded across the INSARAG community globally," A/DC Smith said.

"Team members are often requested to provide mentoring and training, facilitate exercises and share information and techniques with other countries."

"Our USAR team's level of commitment to the mission means it has continued to evolve and improve over time."

A/DC Smith said mentoring the LA team was an incredible privilege.

"Mentoring a USAR team is not about imposing a particular view or approach, but providing independent and objective observations, questions and insights on their entire approach to delivering their capability."

"They then consider what that means for them in their context. Those conversations can be at national government level, sponsoring agency level, team or individual level – you need to assess what the need is and respond in a tailored way."

"It can be incredibly challenging at times, but it's also very rewarding to work so closely with these teams."



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# A champion for Coen

In his role as a Government Champion, Commissioner Greg Leach regularly visits the remote township of Coen on Cape York Peninsula to develop relationships with elders and community stakeholders.

On his most recent visit in March, the Commissioner discussed with the community how government agencies can better support local families, businesses and community organisations.

“It’s important for me to understand the issues within the community and help break down barriers to improve outcomes for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Coen,” Commissioner Leach said.

“The community, about 90 per cent of whom are First Nations Australians, are very passionate about their history and heritage and want the best for their families and community.”

Coen, which has a population of about 400, is isolated for about three months of the year by monsoon rains.

“They face many of the challenges small regional towns across Queensland face in regards to employment and social services,” Commissioner Leach said.

“While passionate about their heritage, local clan groups also want to see Coen advance and achieve modern facilities and support services.”

Commissioner Leach is supporting the community to establish a Local Thriving Community decision-making body, where all clan groups come together to make decisions in the best interests of the community.

“Local Thriving Communities is a significant long-term reform that will embed change, resulting in a visibly different way of working alongside communities to improve outcomes for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples,” he said.

“The decision-making body will be a voice for engaging with government to invest in things that will make the community stronger and make decisions about their own future.”

The Commissioner is also helping establish a men’s crisis centre to help address men’s health, suicide prevention and domestic and family violence.

“It will also be a facility for men to gather and undertake Men’s Shed activities,” he said.

“A Women’s Support Centre was established a couple of years ago. This service provides a safe space for women at risk of domestic and family violence, and for women to gather and undertake support activities.”

Another highlight was the Commissioner’s visit to the local school and kindergarten.

“School attendance rates in Coen are generally high and the primary school benefits from good facilities,” he said.

“There is no high school in Coen, so after completing primary school, students generally attend boarding school in Cairns, about 550 kilometres away.

“Over the past few years, the Government Champion program has refurbished the school music building. It has also contributed \$10,000 to musical instruments and provided a new school amenities block at a budget of \$1.4 million, which is expected to be finished this month.”

Every time the Commissioner visits Coen, he also meets up with local Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service volunteers.

“The Coen Emergency Services were awarded the Assistant Commissioner’s Commendation in 2021 for their support of the community during the Aurukun unrest. It was great to catch up with them in person.”



On his visit to Coen in March, Commissioner Leach met with key community stakeholders.



The Coen Emergency Services have a response area of more than 200 kilometres in any direction.



# New Bushfire Safety Officers care for country

**QFES is appointing eight First Nations Bushfire Safety Officers (BSOs) to conduct mitigation activities, build links with First Nations communities and improve the understanding and use of cultural burning.**

*Response* sat down with three of the BSOs to find out what experience they bring to the roles and what they hope to achieve.

## Healing the landscape

Beau Sinn, the new BSO for South Eastern Region, is a proud Gunditjmurra man.

“I took this role because I wanted to be part of a greater process to heal country from within QFES,” Beau said.

“My Indigenous land management started around 2009 when I worked with traditional owners and elders learning land management on Gubbi Gubbi Country.

“In 2013 I transitioned into a disaster/fire management role in my local council while also joining my local rural fire brigade, Rocksberg-Moorina.

“I’m looking forward to engaging with Indigenous elders, getting them onboard for their expertise and furthering my own knowledge in caring for country.

“Walking, talking and learning living knowledge is an invaluable aspect of this role and moving forward.”

Beau said BSOs had to remain flexible with their work schedule because they could be at work all hours of the day and into the night, and were often out in the field.

“It’s about heading out to a site to walk and talk country, and consulting with stakeholders who then become partners to make the most of bushfire mitigation opportunities.”

He said community engagement was the biggest part of their work in the lead-up to bushfire season.

“We’re encouraging land managers to be connected and work together because fire doesn’t recognise property boundaries.

“In my region we’re coordinating a burn that will cover private and government land for a landscape-wide mitigation strategy.

“The floods this year have created a lot of problems for weeds, debris and access to land, which has changed where landowners can work in the hazard mitigation space.”

Beau said Australia had been burning for thousands of years.



“The landscape has evolved with fire being a major part of the life cycles of native flora and fauna,” he said. “When burnt in the right way, country will thrive.

“Our First Nations peoples have demonstrated through history that caring for country using the right fire at the right time is nothing but beneficial for the country.

“I love learning about the old ways and how fire can be used more positively and proactively to do my part to heal the landscape.”

## Protecting cultural sites

Christopher (Burra) McHughes is a proud Murrwarri/Ngemba man from north-west NSW Brewarrina. He took up the role of BSO for South Western Region in March.

“QFES is doing a lot for cultural inclusion – not just cultural burning but engagement with First Nations communities and cultural collaboration, including artwork on vehicles and buildings,” Burra said.

“I was previously a volunteer with the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) for about 10 years and a staff member for five. I was lucky enough to become a crew leader for the first Indigenous Mitigation Teams with the NSW RFS.

“In that role, we were caring for country and helping out vulnerable First Nations communities. It was my job to go in and build those relationships and get the community feeling safe from fire. We also looked after cultural sites around communities and took away fuel and hazards.”

Burra is responsible for a huge area, from the Great Dividing Range down to the South Australian border.

“I travelled about nine hours west recently and I still didn’t get to the other side of the border.

“As a BSO, I’m responsible for incorporating cultural burning into our mitigation practices to reduce the risk around vulnerable communities.

“There’s already a lot happening in our region and it would be good to involve more First Nations communities and at-risk youth, so people on country can look after country again.”





*The new BSOs will help build connections with custodians of First Nations cultural heritage to better understand how we can protect the land's cultural values from fire.*

Burra recently travelled to Canada to do cultural burning with First Nations peoples and learn their methods.

“I learnt a lot from the First Nations mobs over there. I discussed with the Saskatchewan fire services about how they implement cultural burning and promote Indigenous recruitment.”

In the lead-up to the bushfire season, South Western Region is holding a fire ready workshop on the Bunya Ranges to encourage fire wardens, local stakeholders and landholders to get a better understanding of cultural burning.

“That way when a wildfire comes along, that country will have minimum fuel hazards and the fire will slow right down,” Burra said. “The more places we do it, the less likely there’ll be a bad fire.”

“Everyone in Australia needs to better understand cultural burning. It not only eliminates bushfire risk but helps the animals to thrive and the plants to grow and the environment to become healthier.

“I think not only First Nations peoples but non-First Nations should promote cultural burning to show other organisations and states and territories that this is where we should be heading to make the country better again.”

### Learning from the past

Mick Watego, Brisbane Region’s new BSO, is a Nhughi man from the Quandamooka Nation, his mother’s Country, with connections to Bunjalung Country through his father.

Mick took on the role because he wanted to do more bushfire mitigation work to protect communities.

“I previously worked on the Quandamooka Fire Team on Minjerribah and I’m a member of the QFES Auxiliary Response team on the island,” he said.



“My first bushfire campaign was helping evacuate people during the 2013 fire on Minjerribah.”

In his new role, Mick has already done some overall fuel hazard assessments on Mulgumpin (Moreton Island), which he learnt a lot from.

“I’m meeting with a lot of the members of the Area Fire Management Group (AFMG) and working together to develop our plans for the upcoming bushfire seasons,” he said.

“The group includes stakeholders like city councils, Seqwater, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Queensland Police Service and the Australian Defence Force, and all their service providers.

“Most of my fire experience has been on Minjerribah, learning the ways different landscapes react to fire, and the different types of mitigation activities we can use. Minjerribah has a lot of coastal heath vegetation and bit of dry sclerophyll forest.

“From driving through this region, I can see the difference in the landscapes and I’m really interested in the way fire will react.”

A BSO’s work is always changing – some days Mick is in the office and others he’s out in the field, getting to know the people in the region.

“I’ve been getting around to the brigades in my region to meet them. We have some hazard reduction burns planned but we have to wait for dry weather. In the meantime we’re doing more community engagement.

“It’s important for the whole of Australia to better understand cultural burning. Learning from the past can lead us back to a safer environment in the long run.

“I’m excited to pass on my knowledge and hear from other Indigenous peoples about how they burn and use fire to their advantage.”



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# Someone to talk to

**Response spoke with QFES' State Chaplain Derek Whitehouse about how our volunteer force of 18 chaplains are supporting QFES members and communities across Queensland.**

Derek found his way into chaplaincy after working as a civilian support officer embedded in a military unit.

"I cared for the soldiers," Derek said. "When you're on the ground with 40-tonne vehicles and guns, you want to make sure the soldiers are ok to operate them.

"My job was to identify people who may not be coping and talk to them and see where they were at."

The experience set him up for working at QFES because he understood the emergency services culture.

"QFES has really inspired me because I see how much our staff and volunteers do," Derek said.

"It also concerns me, the things they have to see every day and the effect that has on them.

"I know we get used to our roles but I question whether you can ever get used to that. It's quite an offence to the mind. I just want to help ease that burden."

Derek said the most important quality of a chaplain was friendliness.

"They need to be approachable and good-humoured. They need to be able to listen when the time's right. At an incident, when you go up to people who are in heavy

grief, starting a conversation is the hardest thing in the world to do."

When a chaplain arrives at an incident, they may not go straight to the victims.

"I'll gauge where they're at first," Derek said. "I'll let them know I'm a QFES chaplain and I'm here to help in any way I can.

"I know they're in a difficult state and may not want to talk to me so I might just sit with them. I might leave them and speak to others, but I'll keep coming back, asking one question at a time – is there somewhere you can go, have you contacted your insurance company or talked to work? I offer them my phone if they need to call people.

"Every interaction I deliberately keep short because of the weight of the moment and the busyness of the scene.

"A chaplain's job is not to give advice but to help people find the direction they need to go in."

Chaplains also talk to neighbours or knock on doors in the street to check if people are ok.

"If any emergency services personnel are free, I have a chat to them," Derek said.

"I recognise they're all working so I don't

annoy them. When I see the firefighters taking their boots off outside the truck that's when I ask how it's going."

About half of the chaplains are State Emergency Service or Rural Fire Service members or retired firefighters. During the recent severe weather, some of the chaplains deployed as SES members, but took their chaplain uniforms with them and acted in both roles.

"They literally changed uniform – they had one uniform on one side of the car and one on the other," Derek said.

As well as responding to incidents, chaplains also support QFES staff in general.

"Our chaplains are available for any QFES members and their families to talk to," Derek said.

"We're there to chat to when life gets a bit hard or unsure. You don't have to have a critical incident to talk to a chaplain. It could be issues with finances, kids or relationships. All our conversations are confidential."

To talk to a chaplain, visit the Chaplains page on the Gateway or call 0412 771 727.



Queensland Fire and Emergency Services



State Chaplain Derek Whitehouse has 20 years' experience in chaplaincy and support work.



# Thank you to our incredible volunteers

QFES is lucky to have more than 35,000 volunteers who give up their time to help their fellow Queenslanders. National Volunteer Week, which includes Wear Orange Wednesday, is our chance to thank them.

Over the past 12 months, our volunteers have assisted with COVID-19 border operations, interstate deployment, floods and cyclones.

*Response* talked to four longstanding volunteers about what motivates them.

**Warren Francis**  
Volunteer, Coast Guard  
Unit Training Coordinator, VMR  
Burdekin  
Group Leader, Clare SES

Warren joined the Coast Guard in 2008 and the SES and Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR) in 2018.

“I was a Water Police Officer for 37 years,” Warren said. “I worked a lot with volunteers and I have great admiration for the time they commit and their professionalism.”

One of his biggest operations was coordinating the Defence Force and SES personnel in the 18-day search at Grantham during the Lockyer Valley floods.

You name it, Warren’s seen it, from a boat’s hood being ripped off by a rogue wave, to a boat striking a whale and losing its bow.

He coordinated a dramatic marine rescue after a boat encountered bad weather near Tangalooma one afternoon.

“One of the three people on board swam ashore at Deception Bay at 8pm and said the boat had rolled over and the other two people were in the water.

“We searched all night. At dawn we found another survivor hanging onto a crab pot float. He said the other guy was holding onto a petrol tank and had given up just before daylight. His body was recovered four days later.”

Warren recalled another incident where three young girls were playing in a blow-up boat in the shallows at Deception Bay.

“They started telling each other shark stories. They were only floating in waist-deep water, but because they’d scared each other, no one would hop out. So their boat drifted out into the ocean.

“We had all the Bribie Island VMR out looking for them. We set up a barrier out at Woorim. It was getting late in the evening when a helicopter found the girls near the bottom end of Bribie.”



Warren also coordinated the search for a four-year-old girl who went missing on a cane property near Maryborough.

“We had more than 200 SES members and three helicopters searching that night, but we had to stop the volunteers because their eyes were getting cut from the green leaves on the cane – there was no personal protective equipment in those days.

“We put guards on the waterholes so if the child went near them at night they could stop her falling in. We started searching again at first light, and at 9am one of the helicopters spotted her sleeping in the bottom of a ditch a metre deep.”

But it’s not all about daring rescues. Warren is dedicated to training his fellow volunteers and since the late 90s has organised multi-jurisdictional search and rescue exercises at Burdekin Dam with the Water Police, VMR and SES.

“Volunteers are always saving people. It all comes down to the volunteers because they’re the ones who keep turning up. The most valuable thing in life is someone’s time and these people just keep giving and giving to help their community.”

**Norm Kerle**  
Fire Warden and Training Officer  
Walker Rural Fire Brigade

Norm Kerle recently received a Long Service Medal for five decades of service to the RFS. His father Percy was one of his brigade’s founding members.

“Back then, one of the local landholders, who owned a few thousand acres including Mount Walker, would go for a ride on his horse in spring and drop matches randomly to burn off his land,” Norm said.

“When the fire came down the other side of the mountain, 12 or 15 other landowners including my dad had to put it out.

“My dad approached the fire board to do something about it. They called a meeting at the Mount Walker School and the brigade became active in 1967, with my dad as fire warden and first officer.

“The descendants of that landowner still come to me every spring with a notebook full of burns they want to do.”





Norm said the brigade didn't have a shed until the late 1990s.

"Back in the day we'd break a nice bushy green branch off a tree and flog the fire with it. We had nothing else.

"I recall fighting a fire one day on an old petrol kerosene tractor, when a whirlwind came through. I was covered in flames. I grabbed the spray and kept hosing myself and the tractor until this ball of flame passed and the smoke cleared.

"I once helped the Rosevale brigade fight a fire on a range for a fortnight. I was working with two new firefighters and we found a dry hollow tree burning right up high.

"We didn't have a chainsaw, so I got out the structural nozzle and asked one of the new guys to aim the hose. We managed to get the water to come down into the hollow of the tree and put it out. He said, 'You know, this is better than any training.' And I said, 'Mate this is training.'"

### **Frank Devlin**

**Group Leader**

**Toowoomba SES**

Frank Devlin has been volunteering with the SES for 30 years.

"I'd always thought about joining because I had a few friends in the SES," Frank said. "I turned up to training one night and I've been there ever since. I still have my very first ID card from June 1989."

Over the years, Frank and his team have responded to cyclones Larry and Yasi, as well as the Toowoomba inland tsunami and the 2019-20 bushfires.

Frank said his favourite part of volunteering was being out in the community helping people.

"Everything's happening to them – a hunk of iron coming off the roof, water leaking into their bedroom. It's worth it just to see the look on their face that somebody actually cares about them.

"During the recent severe weather, we had almost 370 calls in one day for people with leaky roofs and sandbags."

Frank always appreciates when people come up to say thank you.

"I was in Coles a couple of weeks ago and the woman at the counter recognised me as an SES member because she'd seen me on the news. She gave me four Freddo Frogs and said, 'You look like you need some chocolate to cheer you up'.

"If there's an emergency you can always count on our members to come in. I have no issues getting good volunteers who can walk through the scrub, do searches and all the things I'm getting a little too old to do.

"I appreciate all the time the members give up for training. It's really heartening to see them turn up – we really appreciate them."

### **Sharon Kratzmann** **Volunteer Scientific Officer**

Sharon Kratzmann is an occupational hygiene and hazardous materials consultant, working to measure, assess and develop control measures to protect workers from hazardous materials like asbestos, mould and silica. Based in Townsville, she's been a volunteer with QFES for 14 years.



"I like being able to share my expertise," Sharon said. "The biggest challenge is applying your knowledge to a situation and gathering data to make decisions about the best way to manage it.

"There can be pressure to have all the answers, but I've learnt to take my time and make a plan."

Sharon has dealt with many kinds of hazardous materials, from white powder incidents to phosphide canisters used to fumigate ships washed up on beaches.

"A fire at a rural chemical supplier in Home Hill involved a particularly complex mix of chemicals," she said.

"I particularly remember that one because I entered the building in a hazmat suit with these huge boots, but I only have size 6 feet, so after a couple of failed attempts I learnt that I had to walk up the stairs sideways.

"The post office at the Lavarack Barracks was once evacuated because white powder was found in an envelope. When I tested the powder, it was only sand. It turned out someone had invited a senior official to a performance set on a beach, and they'd decorated the invitation with sand. It sounds trivial but it was a credible threat and there could have been significant consequences.

"The firefighters are very supportive and respectful of what I bring to the table. After the Home Hill incident, they bought me a smaller set of boots. It's really rewarding to be able to do something like this and help a situation."

*"Volunteers are always saving people. It all comes down to the volunteers because they're the ones who keep turning up. The most valuable thing in life is someone's time and these people just keep giving and giving to help their community."*

– Warren Francis

# A howling success

For 15 years, QFES' Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) canine unit has been on the ground following disasters such as the 2011 earthquakes in New Zealand and tsunami in Japan. Now they're on the scent for new recruits.

Dogs are an important part of USAR operations, and they're often the fastest method for locating casualties trapped underneath the rubble pile from disasters such as earthquakes, landslides, and explosions.

The unit currently has six qualified teams and six teams in training. *Response* caught up with two volunteer handlers, Ingrid and Angelo.

## For the love of dogs

Usually only heard about through social media or word of mouth, the volunteer handler role is niche and requires significant training, but handlers come from all walks of life.

"We've had vets, paramedics, firefighters, concreters, event organisers, dog trainers and prison guards plus many others on the team," Ingrid, a veterinarian, said.

"I think the common denominators are a love for dogs and training, the desire to help others and team spirit."

Ingrid and her dog Ernie, who was rescued from death-row before they joined the unit in 2017, are currently the only Advanced Operational Canine USAR team in Australia, an achievement the whole unit is proud of.

## Best in show

While Queensland Police Service favours German Shepherds or Labradors, USAR canines are chosen for their skills and temperament, not their breed. A love for food or toys (ideally both) as a reward is non-negotiable.

Angelo, a firefighter at Roma St Fire and Rescue Station, said, "Most successful USAR dogs are usually herding dogs, gun dogs or mixes thereof. However, there have been many successful USAR dogs from other breeds. We do not allow brachycephalic breeds (snub nosed dogs) due to risk of overheating."

Ingrid added, "At one time, all our qualified dogs were mutts. Dogs that are too small or too big often struggle with the physical aspects of the job, so most of our dogs are medium sized."

Key attributes are sociability with humans, tolerance of other dogs, agility, mental stability, endurance, resilience and obedience.

## Not all fun and games

USAR dogs are trained for a minimum of two years, and on average, only one in 20 teams that try out end up qualifying for USAR operations.

"USAR demands a lot from the dog, so it is no surprise that only a small percentage go all the way to qualification," Angelo said.

"But it's not all about the dog and even the most suitable dog will go nowhere if the handler is not motivated to put in the endless hours of training required.

The handler needs to be able to read their dog, understand scent movement in a disaster zone, and be able to set their dog up for success."

According to Ingrid, "On average, we allocate an hour of training daily at home in addition to weekend training, which often can take the best part of a day. This adds up to a minimum of 12-15 hours per week."

As well as training to climb ladders and move over loose surfaces, dogs learn to nap on demand during their 10-minute breaks to avoid 'nose fatigue'.

Ingrid and Angelo find it hard to describe the bond between them and their dogs.

"Because we can't see scent, we have to trust our dogs and their incredible sense of smell and learn to read our dogs' body language when they find human scent," Ingrid said.

"Most of our handlers will get hooked on K9 USAR when they see how much their dog enjoys the training. The endless hours of training together just add to that strong bond," Angelo said.

## Join the pack

Both handlers encourage anyone interested to contact the team, which have intake days three times a year. If you don't have a suitable dog, you can join as a 'human member' and the team will help find a suitable canine and provide all required training.

"Being a handler is the most amazing experience! There is no better feeling than watching Ernie narrow down the location of a buried victim and bark to let me know he found someone," Ingrid said.

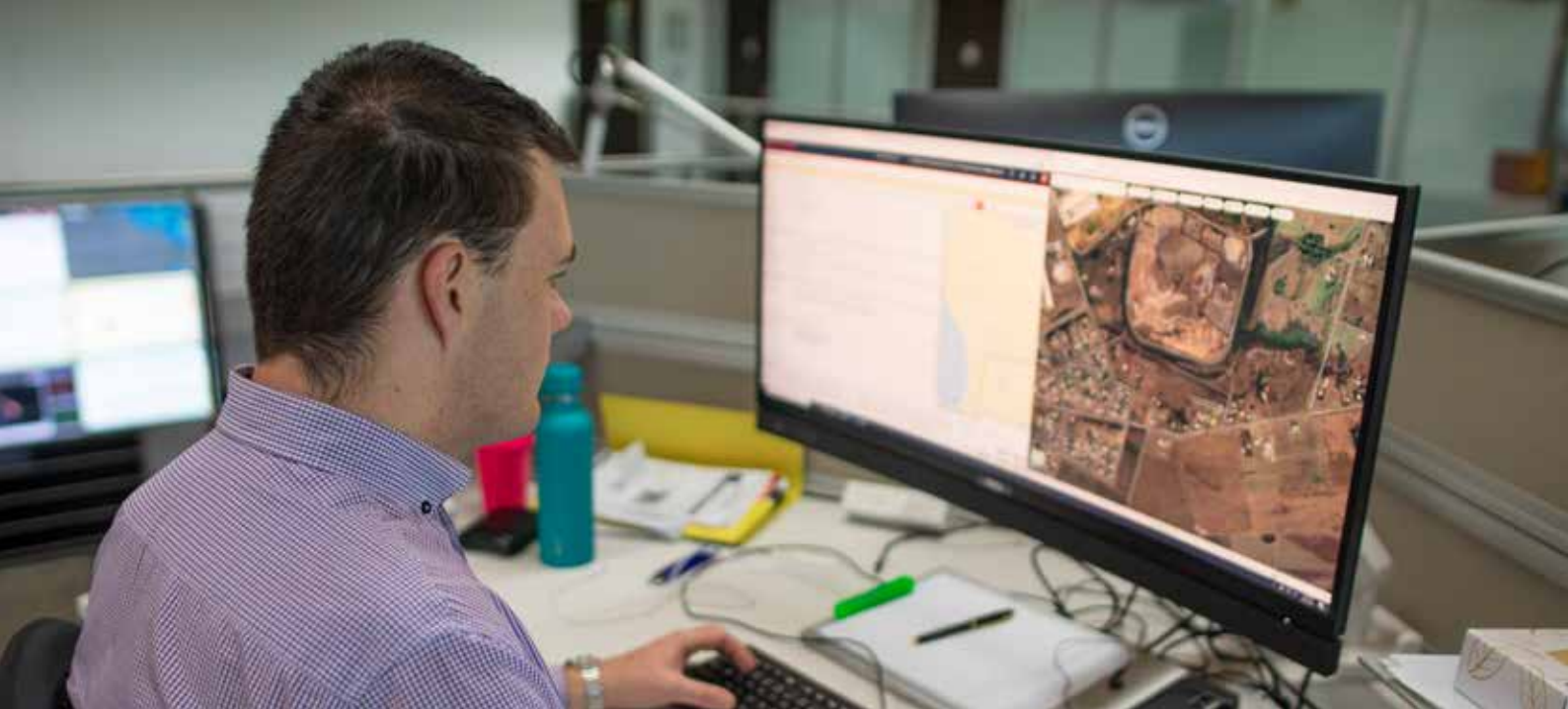
Angelo added, "It's a bigger commitment than most people realise, but it's one of the most rewarding things you will ever do."

If you are interested in joining the team, send an expression of interest to [K9USAR@qfes.qld.gov.au](mailto:K9USAR@qfes.qld.gov.au)



The tight-knit team enjoy working with their best mate.





# The future of warnings

**QFES has changed the way we deliver bushfire warnings, as part of a wider focus on refreshing our Incident Management (IM) capability.**

Deputy Commissioner Mike Wassing said Queensland's bushfire warnings capability had traditionally been delivered by state-based teams.

"During the major bushfires in 2018, followed by those in 2019-20, that capability was stretched beyond its limits. Our people did amazing work, but the system wasn't future ready for enormous bushfire events or concurrent disasters," Mr Wassing said.

QFES established a small team, led by Kath Ryan, to embed the warnings capability into a regional model as part of the broader IM capability in the regions.

"The benefit of embedding warnings in the regions is that warnings are a key part of IM, and IM is a frontline regional responsibility," Mr Wassing said. "It's important to embed all the IM functions, not just operational or planning functions.

"Providing relevant, timely and tailored information to help people get ready for an event is a crucial part of our responsibilities.

"If a warning comes from the region, it can include local knowledge and details people can use at a local level."

Some regions are already running the model and others are still building their capability and training people.

"We've also built a centralised capacity at the State Operations Centre so we can tap into extra capacity during bushfire season."

To support the regional model, the Public Information and Warnings team have automated the distribution of warnings across social media, the QFES website and other platforms.

The team are also leading the implementation of the new Australian Warnings System in Queensland. This nationally consistent system will apply to bushfire, flood, severe weather, cyclone and heatwave.

"Our aim is to establish a common operating system, because at the moment there are different people who can activate different warnings in Queensland, depending on jurisdiction and hazard type," Mr Wassing said.

"We want to make sure that irrespective of the hazard, the warnings are more accessible and consistent.

"QFES is working on these capabilities with a lot of partners from all levels of government and the broader disaster management sector. We're doing this as a collective on behalf of Queenslanders."

QFES is also building other IM functions such as planning and intelligence.

"We now have some embryonic intelligence capacity at a state and regional level through predictive services intelligence coordinators who synthesise data to inform incident controllers to make relevant, timely decisions.

"Our intelligence capability will help improve the accuracy of warnings and inform communities even before an event occurs."

The intelligence services unit was formed in November 2021 with the recruitment of Helen McGarry as the Executive Manager.

Helen said its purpose was to enhance decision-making within QFES and across wider elements of Queensland's disaster management arrangements.

"We will deliver best-practice intelligence solutions to support an all-hazard environment, while enabling collection, analysis, storage and sharing of intelligence at all levels of QFES," Helen said."

"To determine what a future QFES intelligence capability will look like, the unit is currently developing the intelligence strategy, conducting stakeholder engagement, identifying key enablers, understanding QFES information flows, and advising, instructing and preparing QFES Predictive Service Intelligence Coordinators in the functions of intelligence."



Commissioner Leach chaired the panel on 4 May.

# Taking action against domestic and family violence

**Queensland Police Service (QPS) attend around 300 Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) incidents every day. During May's DFV Prevention Month, QFES helps raise awareness of the prevalence of DFV and sends a message that DFV is not tolerated.**

The theme for this year's DFV Prevention Month was 'All of us, together', a pertinent message for QFES and a reminder everyone is responsible for working towards eliminating DFV.

QFES is taking steady action to educate our members to understand DFV and provide support to people experiencing violence and people using violence.

## **An important conversation**

As part of DFV Prevention Month, Commissioner Leach chaired a panel that explored confronting DFV on the job as a first responder, through three different, but interlinked, perspectives.

The panel featured Stacey Ross, CEO Centre for Women; Steve Salisbury, Station Officer, South Eastern Region; and Vanessa Walker, Manager, Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN).

Commissioner Leach said the event was an opportunity to talk about DFV and "shine a torch on this insidious event within our community, do what we can to prevent it from occurring in the first place and support those who are affected by DVF.

"Whether that's our Fire and Rescue Service, Rural Fire Service or State Emergency Service, you're likely to come across these events every day when you are providing your valuable service to the community."

## **"What are we responding to?"**

Steve, a firefighter since 2003, said QFES' first responders may not know they are attending an incident that involves DFV.

"We assist agencies like QPS and Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS)... and those jobs can range from anything to gaining assistance or gaining entry for QAS – when somebody is in an unsafe position

inside a place, or they've been locked in a room.

"It could also be something more significant where someone is threatening to pour fuel over their family members inside a house. It could be a siege situation, and on a regular basis, we are going to jobs like that."

## **"We should talk about this"**

Steve stressed the importance of allowing everyone to communicate how they felt, whether that's on the appliance on the way back to the station, one day or one week after the event.

"Communicating and talking about what we saw, what we did and how we felt when we were responding, can help. It could help someone think, 'Oh okay, I feel okay about this,'" Steve said.

"As a manager, I want to make sure the crew is okay, because so many of the DFV



incidents we attend don't have a great outcome. That was the unfortunate reality for New Beith and Browns Plains recently. We've had a few with quite horrific and life-altering outcomes.

"Part of our job, in conjunction with FESSN, is to make sure our people are okay. Providing a safe workplace has to be one of the priorities... because we don't want any learned behaviour to become an issue going forward."

### "How can I help?"

Stacey described the importance of knowing the appropriate support channels to help someone in need.

"At Centre for Women, when the phone call has finished, it's a matter of debriefing the team leader or manager and going through a risk assessment: how do we need to get involved, how do we make sure this person is safe? Is it a call to QPS or QAS to do welfare checks and so forth.

"It takes a whole team of people to attend to a critical incident, and that's exactly what we do day in day out."

### "I am not okay"

Vanessa, a social worker for more than 20 years and a manager for FESSN, said she often hears first responders say the most distressing part was not having control over the situation they were responding to.

"It's courageous to say, 'I'm feeling really uncomfortable' or 'I'm feeling so angry about what just happened there, and I couldn't do anything,' – they're healthy conversations to have. It helps us move forward and process what has happened," Vanessa said.

"It's okay to have a response to something that has happened. And it doesn't have to be something humongous, it just has to be significant to you.

"It's all about how we support our people so they can be mentally prepared when they walk on to a job, when they're in the job, and what's available to them afterwards."

### Food for thought

Senior Project Officer Sian Fullerton and Program Officer Kaylene Neal held a LunchBytes Session – a short, roundtable discussion – during DFV Prevention Month. They discussed the relevance of Darkness to Daylight, and the support QFES offers to those experiencing DFV.

is very organic and facilitates those conversations."

### Hiding in plain sight

Kaylene, a proud survivor of DFV and chief organiser of QFES' cohort for Darkness to Daylight, said you can hide DFV in the workplace, as her team had no idea of her situation.

"The biggest thing is you're frightened people will judge you and you have to put that out of your head," Kaylene explained.

"Now it doesn't worry me when anyone asks the question because I think the more you can get out about what happened... it can be a trigger about what's happening in someone else's situation.

"I'm so proud to work for QFES and I am so proud of the support they gave me – without that I don't know where I would be. If you take that step, it'll be the first day of the rest of your better life."

### Better together

On 13 April, QFES officially handed over a vacant building to QPS, to be used as a specialised DFV service space. The building, which was scheduled to be sold, has instead been leased by QFES to QPS for \$1 a year. Without this leasing arrangement, it would have taken years for a new purpose-built space, resulting in a win for QFES, QPS and the Toowoomba community.

Assistant Commissioner David Hermann, Chair of the DFV Working Group at QFES, said the idea of the lease started as an informal conversation between himself and a QPS District Officer in Toowoomba.

"There's difficulty in delivering DFV services within an existing police station," Assistant Commissioner Hermann explained.

"QFES recently applied for and received re-accreditation as a White Ribbon Australia Workplace, and supporting this request was a natural extension of QFES' commitment to the community."

Officially opened in April, the survivor-centric space will house specialist QPS DFV officers, staff from Queensland Health and Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy, as well as staff and volunteers from non-government agencies.

## Support

*If you or someone you care about is affected by DFV, free confidential crisis support is available via DV Connect on 1800 811 811 or Mensline 1800 600 636.*

*If you're in immediate danger and need emergency assistance call 000.*

*Non-urgent counselling is available through FESSN at [qfes.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-people](http://qfes.qld.gov.au/supporting-our-people) or call 1800 805 980.*

On average, 110 people die from DFV each year in Australia. The Darkness to Daylight challenge is a 110-kilometre run, where each kilometre represents a life lost. QFES has participated in the event annually since 2017. More than 100 participants from every region took part in 2022.

Sian said there had been huge interest in registrations this year, indicating people want to help.

"Darkness to Daylight is a way that QFES can support community DFV services. It encourages those courageous conversations and helps people open up," Sian said during the session.

"It's important to get the conversations happening and people have found the casual nature of the walking and chatting



The official opening of the DFV service in Toowoomba.



# SOUTH WESTERN REGION

## New RPAS capability

The Regional Leadership Team recently approved the South Western Region Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems (RPAS) Plan.

RPAS can be used for a wide variety of applications such as disaster response, bushfire monitoring and search and rescue operations.

They are deemed an aircraft and by incorporating this capability, QFES is considered a commercial aircraft provider, required to adhere to all rules and regulations directed by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). Pilots need to be approved by CASA and receive a licence.

In South Western Region, RPAS will have four main roles: Senior Remote Pilot, Remote Pilot, Deputy Maintenance Controller and



Observers. A training package for all positions is available and all identified staff will have access to the material and ongoing development to ensure our region maintains a high level of expertise.

RPAS is a regional QFES capability involving all services and the initial RPAS locations are Toowoomba and Roma, providing capability throughout the region. Our region has purchased four RPAS units with support kits and iPads.

Two of the RPAS are DJI Mavic Minis, which are smaller, more robust units for internal and fire investigation uses.

The other two are DJI Mavic Enterprise Advances, with optical zoom for search and rescue, thermal capability, spotlight and external speaker. They are ideal for external use.

Stay tuned for more exciting news about our region's RPAS capability.

## Connecting with community at the Roma Show

QFES personnel from all services engaged with the community at the Roma Show in May, along with the Queensland Ambulance Service and Local Ambulance Committee.

The Roma Show is the largest community engagement event in the Warrego area each year and QFES took the opportunity to connect with locals and visitors alike about risks and how to prepare.

On display was a service Emergency Response Vehicle, a water tanker from the Orange Hill Rural Fire Brigade, the Roma SES Boat, Roma Fire and Rescue Service Pumper and a Roma Ambulance.

The main topics of discussion were localised flooding, grass and bushfires, local fuel loads, home fire safety, first aid and CPR.



## Combined road crash rescue exercise

Warwick State Emergency Service (SES) volunteers and auxiliary firefighters took part in a road crash rescue exercise at the Warwick Fire and Rescue Station.

The SES crew set up lighting, stabilised the vehicles, gained entry using hydraulic tools, and removed the doors and roof. They then used a modified dash roll and modified dash lift to extricate both trapped casualties.

## Unit complex fire training

Crews from Crows Nest, Killarney and Highfields took part in a training exercise involving a two-storey unit complex fire with people reported missing.

Three Breathing Apparatus crews entered the structure to suppress fire on the ground floor, which eventually breached into the first floor. They rescued all six people who had been unaccounted for on both levels.





# FAR NORTHERN REGION



## Twenty-four-hour mountain rescue

In May, four State Emergency Service (SES) members from Cairns and one from Gordonvale responded to a request from the Queensland Police Service to help locate a missing person at the summit of Mount Bartle Frere.

The SES arrived at the base of the mountain at 5am. The gruelling hike up took them seven hours through difficult terrain under intense weather conditions.

Once they reached the top, they were only 400 metres from the missing person's last known location, but it took another three hours for them to cover the distance.

The cloud, rain and wind made it virtually impossible to search the thick forest, but the team persevered. They used whistles and shouts to find the missing person, who was alive but in bad condition after spending the night alone in the rainforest.

It took the SES members another four hours to assist the missing person back to their shelter at the summit.

Here the team faced a difficult decision: stay or walk out. At significant risk of hypothermia, the team started the trek down the mountain at 8pm. They stayed clear-headed and made their way down slowly, reaching the base at 4.30am and reuniting the missing person with their mother.

QFES acknowledges the efforts of Steve Schwartz, Daniel Ginnaw, Matilda Gordon, Harriet Donnelly and Alexander Rayner, along with supporting members from Cairns and Buchans Point, the second team that climbed the mountain to deliver supplies, and the members that came out in the early hours to make sure the teams had warm clothes, food and transport when they reached the base.

## The journey to becoming a Station Officer

Professional Development Command in Far Northern Region recently conducted Officer Development Training to train and prepare candidates to become Station Officers.

The candidates are at varying stages of the process, but they are all working to manage incidents with two or more appliances, at buildings with multiple levels and complex layouts.

Candidates worked on their tactical priorities and overall incident management to coordinate up to 16 QFES personnel and bring the situation under control.

Local sporting and community groups, along with the council, granted access to various buildings such as the Cairns Performing Arts Centre, providing a more realistic scenario for our staff.

Far Northern Region wishes all current and future candidates embarking on the Officer Development Program all the best in becoming Station Officers and leaders of the community.





# NORTHERN REGION



## Local Area Warden workshop better prepares Burdekin

A first-of-its-kind workshop was held recently to better prepare the Burdekin Local Area Warden (LAW) group for future events.

The group was established to provide the Burdekin Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) with a communication channel to better understand significant situations within communities during disasters.

LAWs provide advice about river heights and water inundation, as well as the need for urgent medical support, essential resupply or situational awareness to support the community before, during and after disasters.

Councillor Lyn McLaughlin, Chair of the LDMG and Mayor of the Burdekin Shire Council, opened the workshop.

Key themes included safety considerations, weather overviews and Emergency Action Plans for dams and water storage.

QFES Emergency Management Coordinator Andy Pethybridge detailed the LAW's responsibilities in a disaster, the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements and associated governance.

"Activities such as these are great opportunities to develop a better understanding of the respective processes, strengthen awareness of the opportunities, and foster deeper relationships and continuous improvement," Andy said.

Photos supplied by Nathan Toll, Burdekin Shire Council.



## Admin Toolbox tour

As part of an ongoing Admin Toolbox program, the Northern Region Admin Team were given the opportunity for a guided tour through the Townsville City Council Local Disaster Coordination Centre.

It was a great chance for the team to develop their understanding of how our services work in conjunction with local, state and federal government departments, not-for-profits and private enterprise to prepare for and respond to events.

## Exercise Chrysus

More than 80 Rural Fire Service (RFS) members from across Northern Region came together at Charters Towers Showgrounds for a three-day training exercise.

Crews participated in scenario-based training to ensure operational readiness before bushfire season.

Strike teams were exposed to a wide range of operational areas and workshops covering mental health, communications, Australian Fire Danger Rating System, P3 Negative Masks, CPR refreshers and volunteer community education.

The mitigation training included best practice using traditional methods presented by Murrandoo Yanner Jnr, Maali Yanner and Kevin Anderson from the Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation.

The weekend also presented the opportunity for several medal presentations to members from Charters Towers and Mount Isa by AC Steve Barber and A/AC RFS Tony Johnstone.

The crews stayed in a flexible habitat to test their capability to be self-sufficient during large-scale incidents or deployments. The flexible habitat is a self-contained moveable facility with operational areas, sleeping quarters and hygiene facilities.

The RFS members also showed support for one of their own with the Exercise Hairchop #heartkids fundraiser, raising a massive \$6280 over the weekend.





# CENTRAL REGION

## Enhancing heavy vehicle rescue skills in Central Region

Central Region firefighters have been given the opportunity to enhance their heavy vehicle road crash rescue skills with training conducted at the five primary Central Region stations equipped with heavy rescue response capability.

The training has occurred so far in Rockhampton, Mackay and Gladstone, and future training is planned for Emerald and Longreach. The need for further heavy rescue training has also been identified for stations who support responses to heavy vehicle incidents.

Central Region's specialised heavy vehicle rescue trainers have developed training scenarios to cover experiences that firefighters will need to be competent in, but may not see every day.

Crews practise cutting-edge heavy vehicle rescue techniques on various heavy equipment at the different locations.

The training team would like to thank some local businesses who donated the use of their equipment for the training: Freight Solutions Australia Group (FSA) Rockhampton, Walz Constructions (Gladstone), AG Equipment (Gladstone), Zarb Road Transport (Mackay), Keetah Contractors (Gladstone) and KJP Haulage (Gladstone).



## Regional Community Engagement Network on the road

The Regional Community Engagement Network (RCEN) is on the move with plans to hold meetings throughout Central Region.

The meetings will bring together local QFES personnel and partners with regional resources to discuss local area priorities, challenges and risks and to identify collaborative community engagement opportunities and required resources.

The RCEN visited the Banana Shire Council area in April. In addition to the usual agenda, a special section focused on community engagement in the Banana Shire.



Local QFES personnel and partner agencies were invited to come along and collaborate on how we can work together to assist our communities to be more prepared, resilient and connected.

Some great discussions were had and a working group was formulated to advance discussions into actions. The first collaborative display was held at the Callide Valley show. Another meeting was held in Gladstone in June.



## Building emergency management capability in Woorabinda

Yoonthalla means "As one, in the one place" and is the chosen name for a collaborative project with the people of Woorabinda and emergency services.

The QFES team are excited to be involved in developing relationships further and working side-by-side in collaboration with the Woorabinda community to create a sustainable, self-led emergency management capability within the community.

Emergency services personnel were welcomed into the Woorabinda community with a traditional smoking ceremony during Harmony Week and it's safe to say everyone left the gathering in high spirits.

On-boarding began within the community in April and initial State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service training will begin in the coming months. The project will also work closely with the Indigenous Rangers program.



## QFES Leadership Foundations: Leading Self Program

Staff and volunteers from Central Region came together in Rockhampton for a two-day QFES Leading Self Program in late April.

The program provides a unique perspective on leadership, designed to help individuals adapt to the challenges faced by our organisation in a fast-paced, changing environment.

A special thank you to the organisers of the event and the guest speakers who shared their stories with the group.

Participants came away enthused and ready to use the lessons learnt in their work life.

# END OF FINANCIAL YEAR EVENT

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# NORTH COAST REGION

## RPAS capability put to the test

North Coast Region's Remotely Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) and Mountain Rescue team recently conducted an exercise at Mount Tibrogargan in the Glass House Mountains to test the operational capabilities of the latest drone technology.

The drone can deliver a payload to climbers or rescuers and provide safety and comfort by lighting up a large area. The drone can also deliver a line to people stranded in floodwaters, making swift water rescues quicker and safer.



## P-CEP Peer Leader Workshops underway

Noosa Council, Queensland Disability Network and QFES held Peer Leader Workshops around Noosa to encourage Queenslanders with a disability to complete their Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) workbook and start preparing for emergencies.

The workshop also identified people interested in becoming Peer Leaders. Peer Leaders encourage their networks to attend future sessions to learn how to use the P-CEP workbook, have conversations around the P-CEP capability wheel and discuss emergency preparedness and what they can do at home.



## Kiwi Woggle Gympie

Gympie auxiliary firefighters recently held a day-long event at the Gympie showgrounds, hosting 176 scouts during their Kiwi Woggle competitive camp.

The firefighters conducted 12 kitchen fire demonstrations as well as information sessions about their duties from pump operation and branch handling to breathing apparatus and road crash rescue tools.

The scouts took the opportunity to operate case one hose reels and ground monitor operations.



# BRISBANE REGION

## QFES shines at Essential Services Awards

Several QFES members were recognised in the Rotary Club of South Brisbane’s annual Essential Services Awards Dinner in May.

Since 2012, the awards have recognised officers from the essential services who have provided a service over and above their normal duties.

Station Officer Simon Johnstone from Wishart Fire and Rescue Station was awarded the Essential Services Awards for working to ensure the communities of both Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) and the Southern Brisbane Region received the highest level of community service by QFES.



Simon has been instrumental in continuing road crash rescue methods and techniques with Wishart Fire and Rescue Station crews and training state-wide recruits at the Whyte Island Training Facility.

Simon also contributes to training Auxiliary Fire Officers on Minjerribah and is an Air Attack Supervisor for the Fire and Rescue Air Operations Team during bushfire season.

In his spare time, Simon is an active member of the North Stradbroke Island Surf Life Saving Club.

Six members of a Swiftwater Rescue Crew were also recognised for conducting multiple rescues during the recent floods in Brisbane. The crew rescued a person stuck in a tree about 25 metres from the bank in a fast-flowing creek, as well as four adults and two children trapped in houses upstream. They also rescued a group of people from a house surrounded by more than one-and-a-half metres of water.

State Emergency Service members Enrica Brazzelli, Matt Fitzpatrick, Deni Keeshan, Gilbert Brant and Peter Jory were also honoured for their dedication and commitment to serving the community.

## Wynnum house fire response

When FireCom received multiple calls to a house fire at Wynnum, firefighters did an incredible job battling a running fuel fire and multiple exposures.

Two people with disabilities were initially reported missing from a caravan near the house, but the crews kept a cool head and all persons were accounted for.

When crews arrived, the fire had just breached the lower window of the house next door, breaking the glass, melting the internal blinds and filling the house with smoke.

Three BA teams went into action to extinguish the flames. Gas bottles on the front of the caravan had been impinged and one was venting.

One crew went around to another side of the house to fight fire that had spread to the shed and fence.

*Photos supplied by Elliott Burton.*



## A hard day’s work

Three crews of firefighters worked hard under harsh conditions on a steaming hot day to extinguish a house fully involved in fire.

They used two lines of Case 3 external straight up, followed by a line of Case 1 internal. All persons were accounted for on arrival.

The dramatic scene was captured by firefighter Elliott Burton from Wynnum Fire and Rescue Station.



# SOUTH EASTERN REGION



## Plane crash anniversary rescue

In a remarkable coincidence, Scenic Rim State Emergency Service (SES) conducted a rescue at the site where, on the same day 85 years earlier, two survivors were rescued from a plane crash.

On 19 February 1937, a small aircraft flying from Brisbane to Sydney crashed into the McPherson Range near the NSW border, with five passengers and two pilots on board.

Several search efforts were made, mostly in NSW, before Bernard O'Reilly from the Lamington Guest House trekked 26 kilometres into the rainforest and found the wreckage on 27 February, along with two survivors, one with a broken leg.

Four others were killed instantly in the crash. Another passenger, after sustaining major burns, left to find help but died after falling off a cliff.

On 19 February 2022, Scenic Rim SES took part in another rescue when hikers got lost between Point Lookout and the plane crash site.

Working with the Queensland Police Service, the SES sent in a team to locate and extricate the hikers. Anyone who has been to this area knows how rugged the country is.

After many hours bush bashing through 'wait a while' and thick, wet rainforest the hikers were located and returned to the safety of the carpark. By 10pm all teams were out and ready for a hot shower and bed.

*Historical photo courtesy of Beaudesert Historical Museum.*

[www.qfes.qld.gov.au](http://www.qfes.qld.gov.au) | 13 QGOV (13 74 68)

## Beaudesert Emergency Services Cadets start

The new Beaudesert Emergency Services Cadets program has started meeting on Monday nights at the Beaudesert Fire and Rescue Station. The program is run by the Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) and financed by QFES.

Local PCYC program coordinator Andrew Clarke and the team organised a display day for the cadets and parents.

"After that, we introduced the phonetic alphabet and showed the cadets through road crash rescue," Andrew said. "We had a counsellor from Kids Help Line pop in and give the kids a talk about mental health."

Starting with 12 cadets, the group is hoping to expand, with interest from parents and children in other parts of the Scenic Rim, Logan and the Gold Coast.

"They can stay until they're 17 and from there they can apply to become an adult leader and come on as a volunteer or they can join QFES or whatever avenue they want to take," Andrew said.



## Hazard Reduction Burns at the Gold Coast

South Eastern Region's Bushfire Planning and Mitigation Unit Burn Team has started work for this year's Hazard Reduction Burn (HRB) program as part of Operation Sesbania.

The Burn Team is responsible for conducting safe, controlled HRBs across the City of Gold Coast's conservation estates. A normal season for the team can consist of at least 20 separate burn sites, totalling more than 300 hectares.

Bushfire Safety Officer Rebecca Powell, First Officer of Mudgeeraba Rural Fire Brigade, is doing a fantastic job in overseeing the day-to-day operations of the Burn Team.

The team also have the mammoth job of preparing the HRB sites by creating and maintaining radiation zones, containment lines and existing fire trails.

The local community values significant trees, hollow logs and local flora and fauna, and the Burn Team works hand-in-hand with the council to protect these precious wildlife habitats.



The team also undertakes community education activities with the City of Gold Coast's neighbouring properties to ensure residents are aware of the mitigation work and bushfire risks.



*Interacting with his alpacas is part of Joe's recovery from cancer.*

# A cancer journey

**A QFES member's recent brush with cancer has highlighted the benefits of being proactive with your own health.**

June 13 to 19 is International Men's Health Week, designed to provoke discussions about how to improve men's health.

Joe Pope, Manager of Incident Management Training at the State Operational Coordination Branch, was diagnosed with colon cancer last year. He shared his journey with *Response* so other QFES members could learn from it and look out for each other.

Joe delayed his 50-year check-up because it was the start of the pandemic and he'd just moved to Brisbane.

"Once settled, I made it to the doctor for a check-up," he said. "My iron level was a bit low so I did a stool test. They found blood so I went to do a colonoscopy.

"The bowel prep was foul and terrible and made me gag, but it did its job," Joe said. "I drank three glasses of solution four hours apart and arrived at the hospital a lot lighter than the day before.

"The doctor said he had to remove 55 polyps in a two-hour procedure. He said they looked like hemotomious polyps, which aren't aggressive, but given the number of polyps, he wanted to do another procedure in six months."

In May 2021 Joe had a second colonoscopy. The good news was there were only five polyps.

“The doctor called afterwards and asked if I could come straight in. The drive seemed to take forever, with all sorts of things going through my head. It seemed like every traffic light was against me.

“I was ushered straight in to see the doctor. One of the polyps had tested positive to cancer. He said he could operate Monday morning.”

The four-and-a-half-hour operation would involve a colon resection where the doctor removed 30 centimetres of upper colon.

“The first thing was to tell my wife and family I had cancer. My delivery was basically, ‘Honey today I have cancer but come Monday lunchtime, I won’t’.

“I had an upbeat ‘I’m going to get through this’ attitude to the whole thing. In 28 years as a firefighter I’ve seen enough to know how life changes so fast. This was not going to be how I left, not just yet anyway.”

The operation went well and the doctors removed 12 lymph nodes because they looked inflamed on a CT scan. Two of the lymph nodes tested positive to colon cancer, so Joe underwent 12 rounds of chemotherapy.

“I was allowed home on the Wednesday. I was in pain as the doctors had cut through the muscle at the base of the abdomen. I had to sleep in a chair for two days before I was able to get in a bed.

“I couldn’t leave the house for two weeks and it was another six weeks before I could start returning to work.

“Once I’d recovered from the main surgery I had a portacath inserted in front of my right shoulder. This allowed easy access for the chemotherapy and saved the veins in my arm.”

Some of the chemo drugs required Joe to wear a pump wherever he went.

“Tuesday became chemo day, Wednesday was pump change and the second round of chemo drugs, and Thursday was pump off. This was followed by two days of sleeping and heavy fatigue. Sunday was rest day and then I felt really good for seven days. This cycle was required 12 times.

“I completed chemo the week before Christmas, but the cumulative effect has left me with numbness in my feet and fingers that will take up to 12 months to go away.

“My bloods returned to normal on my eight-week check-up. All going well the portacath will come out in mid-July and then I’ll do three-monthly blood tests for the next 12 months.”

## Here for you

Joe said support from QFES, fellow firefighters and staff was amazing.

“I’ve been surprised by the number of people who have opened up about having been through the same or similar. Their support has meant a lot through some pretty tough days.

“The flexibility in the workplace and support from the Health and Wellbeing team has shown that QFES’ support for staff is well and truly first rate.”

Joe has since changed his diet to eat less processed foods and more greens.

“My advice would be to stay active and ensure you and others follow the policy and procedures. It’s not always about ourselves – we need to really look out for each other’s exposure.

“Don’t be afraid of the thought of a check-up. Honestly, the thoughts are way worse than the actual procedures.”

Michelle Hilhorst, Acting Manager of Injury Management, said early detection and treatment in most conditions not only led to better outcomes, but could also minimise the impact to a person’s ongoing capability and lifestyle.

“This is not only for the workplace benefit allowing them to successfully undertake their role and attend the workplace, but also for their own health outside work – their ability to enjoy activities, hobbies, family, external responsibilities etc,” Michelle said.

“Some of the things you can do is have regular checks with your treating practitioner, seek medical

reviews early if you notice anything or feel unwell, and follow any medical advice and recommendations.

“All workers who suffer any illness or injury are supported by Injury Management and have an assigned Rehabilitation and Return to Work Coordinator (RRTWC) with QFES as well as a case worker at WorkCover if they have an accepted claim. There are RRTWC advisors in each region so all QFES members have a local point of contact.

“The RRTWC will assist during the claim process, remain in regular contact during absence from work and facilitate a return-to-work program.

“QFES has an Injury Management Policy and Procedure to support injured workers for both work and non-work related injury or illness.”

The Fire and Emergency Services Support Network (FESSN) also provides free access to a team of highly qualified psychologists and counsellors in addition to Peer Support Officers.

## Bowel Cancer Awareness Month

*June is Bowel Cancer Awareness month. Bowel cancer, also known as colorectal cancer, is one of the presumptive cancers for QFES operational personnel.*

*It is estimated to be the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia, but it has a high survival rate when picked up early.*

*Eligible Australians aged 50 to 74 can be tested as part of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.*

*You can access many different cancer support groups across Queensland and Australia. Find out more at [qld.gov.au/health/support/cancer](http://qld.gov.au/health/support/cancer).*

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# Service and sacrifice

## Recognising Queensland's finest emergency workers

More than 90 remarkable Queenslanders were honoured during this year's Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) Australia Day Achievement Awards for selfless service to regional communities across the state.

Recognising achievements of emergency workers, such as the development of new training programs for service personnel and educating vulnerable communities on fire safety, the series of regional ceremonies took place in June, after being previously postponed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

In their 14th year supporting the awards, QSuper, now a part of Australian Retirement Trust, has unearthed some inspiring stories of this year's recipients.

In Queensland's South East, Garry Fordham was recognised for his commitment to the Rural Fire Service as Brigade Training and Support Officer.

Garry's dedication and commitment to support volunteers' wellbeing has been uncompromising, particularly during the 2019/2020 bushfire season. Garry has also worked hard to ensure essential training for volunteers has continued.

On the North Coast, First Officer Scot Perrie was recognised for outstanding leadership in heading operations following the Black Summer fires. Scot trained new recruits and had considerable input into the development of a new emergency service centre in Sunshine Coast hinterland town of Maleny.

Extended periods of service are an achievement themselves, and in Queensland's Far North, State Emergency Service volunteer Marilyn George will be recognised for her 26th year of service.

"Despite the awards being rescheduled to protect the health and safety of our communities during the pandemic, the value of recognising these essential workers remains the same," Australian Retirement Trust Anne Fuchs said.

"Many of our Queensland members live rurally and remotely. Through our support we not only honour those on the frontline, but the networks of people who ensure the ongoing safety and support of our communities in times of crisis or emergency.

"The stoicism displayed by volunteer and professional staff of the QFES remains unrivalled. We are indeed in excellent hands."

QFES staff and volunteers from the State Emergency Service (SES), Rural Fire Service (RFS), and Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), are among those recognised.

"QFES is home to thousands of dedicated staff and volunteers committed to serving their local communities through disasters and emergencies," QFES Commissioner Greg Leach said.

"All recipients of this year's Australia Day Achievement Awards, and indeed all those within QFES, go above and beyond to keep Queensland safe.

"We sincerely thank the QSuper team and Australian Retirement Trust for its ongoing support. This is an important event in our calendar each year and the support from the QSuper team enables us to recognise the fantastic efforts of our staff and volunteers."

The ceremonies took place in Cairns, Kedron, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Mackay, Toowoomba, Townsville and Beenleigh, from 7 June – 10 June.

QFES staff and volunteers received accolades in recognition of outstanding character, integrity and leadership during these ceremonies.

[qsuper.qld.gov.au](https://qsuper.qld.gov.au)

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QFES members paid their respects at services around the state on Anzac Day.



In May, QFES commemorated the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia and Transphobia, which celebrates LGBTQI+ people globally and raises awareness for work still needed to end discrimination.



QFES helped the Queensland Police Service launch National Road Safety Week in May beside the Bruce Highway at Burpengary. Photo supplied by Graham Davis.



Around Queensland people donned orange to say thank you to the State Emergency Service on Wear Orange Wednesday.



Almost 1400 people abseiled from the roof of Queensland Country Bank Stadium to break the world record for the most people to abseil in 12 hours. QFES staff and volunteers organised the Abseil for Health to raise funds for Brighter Lives Townsville Hospital Foundation.



The children at Pine Mountain Road Child Care said thank you to local State Emergency Service volunteers for their work during the recent floods.



In May, QFES launched Mindarma, a new online program that supports the psychological wellbeing of our volunteers.





The National Fire and Emergency Memorial Service in Canberra honoured personnel who have lost their lives in the line of duty. Thirteen fire and emergency service personnel were commemorated, including State Emergency Service volunteer Merryl Dray. An AFAC Memorial Medallion was presented to her family.



A mother and son team in the State Emergency Service celebrated Mother's Day by searching for a missing person on Mount Bartle Frere, Queensland's highest mountain. Photo supplied by Eleanor Rosam.



Rural Fire Service volunteer Robert Millar was awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) at Queensland's Government House. He was recognised for his service to the community through the Samford Rural Fire Brigade as Chairman and Fire Warden.



The biennial State Emergency Service Leadership Conference brought together more than 150 volunteers, Local Controllers and staff.



Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) crews participated in a training exercise at Brisbane Airport, responding to a mock plane crash. FRS teams supported the Aviation Rescue Fire Fighting Service by supplementing water supplies and assisting with fire attack. They also helped paramedics get casualties out of the hot zone.



# Standing up for diversity

**Paula Douglas helped break new ground for women in QFES and is now working to support young people and LGBTQI+ people in the community.**

Paula was the first permanent female firefighter in South Western Region and worked her way up to Station Officer at Toowoomba Fire and Rescue Station.

“To be honest, I was so focused on starting a career with QFES and doing the best I could at the job, I didn’t really pay attention to being the first,” Paula said.

“But when I look back on it now, it’s a pretty inspiring accomplishment to be the pioneer for Toowoomba.”

Paula works with partner organisations to support young people in the community.

“Toowoomba doesn’t have a lot of community activities for young people, and there’s a lot of youth homelessness and crime,” she said.

“At any point in time in Toowoomba, hundreds of kids are homeless. That’s the undercurrent you never hear about in the community unless you talk to youth justice or domestic and family violence services.

“We have a lot of different services in our community, and they all offer the same

things but differently, so the trick is how to bring all those people together and have a conversation about what the problems are and how we can all help.

“QFES can provide SafeHome visits for disadvantaged families, or reach young people through the Fight Fire Fascination (FFF) or Roads, Attitudes and Action Planning (RAAP) programs.

“As firefighters, we use our experience to support other services. We recently talked to Multicultural Development Australia about how to better facilitate fire safety in our multicultural community.”

Paula, who identifies as a lesbian, also meets with friends who are part of an allied network of supporters.

“We work to support other avenues such as Headspace, or Lifeline’s critical incident counselling for LGBTQI+ people, which is the only program of its kind in Australia,” she said.

Paula said QFES has come a long way in terms of accepting diversity since she joined 14 years ago.

“Personally, I’ve had some negative experiences but not a lot,” she said. “A lot of work has been done around gender, and generally people are welcoming and accepting, but there’s still a long way to go for QFES to become a totally inclusive environment. There’s still a lot of gendered language and talk about ‘the guys’.

“I had a conversation with a trans person recently and I was horrified by the experiences they went through and the abuse they received from the general public. There’s still very much a prevalence of homophobic violence in our community.”

Paula said it was important for QFES to promote initiatives like the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT) to provide visibility.

“There are quite a few people who identify as LGBTQI+ in QFES, and it shows a great deal of support for the organisation to stand up and say we don’t accept intolerance here, nor should we within our community. It helps people in the community feel they’re safe and supported as well.”



## ***A guide to pronouns***

*Pronouns are words used to refer to a person rather than using their name. Studies show using a person’s correct pronouns fosters a supportive and inclusive environment and affirms a person’s gender identity.*

*Using the right pronouns to refer to a person is a simple way to show them respect because it affirms the way they see themselves. You can’t tell what pronouns people use by looking at them.*

*For those who identify as transgender (people who don’t identify with the sex they were assigned at birth), gender diverse or non-binary, having their pronouns listed is really important.*

*Adding your pronouns in your signature block is a small action but it can have a huge impact on how people can feel included in the workplace.*



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